

NEWS FROM:

International Terrorism and Nonproliferation Subcommittee



U.S. Rep. Ed Royce, Chairman

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Royce Statement on Averting Nuclear Terrorism

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Today, the House Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation (ITNP) held a hearing on the challenges of averting nuclear terrorism. ITNP Chairman U.S. Rep. Ed Royce (R-CA-40) issued the following opening statement:

"A terrorist nuclear attack on U.S. soil would likely take a devastating toll in lives and property, with unimaginable consequences for the American economy and way of life. Terrorists groups, primarily al Qaeda, but maybe others, are pursuing nuclear capabilities. The 9/11 Commission report stated that al Qaeda efforts to acquire nuclear weapons reach back at least ten years. A spokesman of Osama bin Laden has said that al Qaeda aspires to kill four million Americans. Bin Laden has sought and received from a radical Saudi cleric a *fatwa* sanctioning a nuclear strike against U.S. civilians.

"It is hard to gauge the likelihood of terrorists accessing a nuclear weapon and delivering it against the United States. Some believe that building a crude nuclear weapon would be well within the technological reach of terrorists once they secured the necessary amount of fissile material. We do not have the luxury of assuming a high hurdle. Last year, a Pentagon group reported, 'Nuclear knowledge, materials, and weapons are oozing out of control. Nuclear weapons technology and knowledge continue to spread. Nuclear explosives themselves, and nuclear materials, are spreading into hands hostile or potentially hostile to the United States.' Russia, with vast nuclear stockpiles and growing terrorist activity, has been a country of considerable concern. So are Iran and North Korea, two sponsors of terrorism with advanced nuclear capabilities.

"The A.Q. Khan network is another wake-up call. Before this sophisticated network was exposed, key nuclear technology was transferred from Pakistan to Libya, Iran and elsewhere. Anyone with money, it appears, could have acquired nuclear technology. Once secured, terrorists may try to smuggle a nuclear weapon into the U.S., using the routes by which large quantities of contraband is routinely smuggled into our country. I am particularly concerned about our porous borders, where we need to improve security quickly. Passage of the REAL ID Act by the Senate is critical.

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"Throughout the Cold War, containing the Soviet Union was the central principle of U.S. foreign policy. Fending off Russian expansionism guided our alliance, military, and economic policies. Those who believe that the world is at a turning point today, with terrorist groups seeking to acquire nuclear weapons material, posing a mortal threat, ask whether nuclear terrorism is near the focus that the Soviet threat was. I know that answer.

"Today we will hear about research efforts aimed at better identifying an exploded nuclear weapon's origin through forensic examination. This information would be critical in directing our reaction to a nuclear attack. More hopefully, it could help prevent an attack from ever happening. Potential state sponsors of nuclear terrorism might pause before sharing nuclear material and technology with terrorists if they knew this aid would be traced back to their capital. Not all would-be nuclear terrorists hold religious or apocalyptic beliefs that welcome death. Some might be less inclined to attack U.S. targets if they knew that they would be held accountable, as were the Taliban, many who were killed in response to the 9/11 attacks.

"This hearing will focus on the challenges of averting nuclear terrorism. Future planned hearings will look in detail at specific U.S. policies and programs designed to avoid the ultimate terrorist attack, such as the Proliferation Security Initiative, which has helped reduce this threat."

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